

Dear Colleague,

I have been contacted by many party members recently following the resignation of Róisín Shortall. They have expressed disquiet at the events surrounding that resignation and with a number of other issues. I am conscious, as Party Chairperson, of my duty of care towards the party's members and to the party itself. To that end I have been active in progressing improvements in the connections between the Party Leadership, the PLP, our local representatives and our membership.

The Party Leader took the initiative to contact me over the weekend just gone by and we discussed this issue and some of the other challenges we currently face as a party. As agreed in that phone call, we met yesterday, the 2nd October, for what was a focused and substantive meeting.

At this point the Party Leader and I are being guided by the principle that we should focus more on fixing the problems rather than on fixing the blame and seek to navigate a way forward from our current position.

There are structural issues in the party but these are in the process of being addressed with a recently appointed national organiser and the recruitment of four new regional organisers. Other reforms and changes are needed and both the Executive Board and the Central Council should now seek to identify what changes are needed and to accelerate our progress on that. Any reflections that you have in this area would be most welcome.

One of our fellow members recently wrote to me saying, "I feel personally that what is needed here is greater communication and clarification as we, the ordinary members, are totally reliant on media reports which will of course always carry their own individual bias." I could not agree with our colleague more.

The Party Leader and I discussed the quality of our engagement with members and we are in agreement that there is room for improvement. This may require investment in infrastructure and time and the Party Leader and I are committed to both. The quality of engagement with Councillors has also not been as it should be and the Party Leader and I will be working through the Executive Board to improve on that.

He also shared with me his view on recent events and I am satisfied that there is another context to the story that he has not been able to publicly articulate, given the media atmosphere at this time. This context needs to be discussed with the party's members and he is considering how to do that at some point in the future.

To that end I am today working with the Party Leader on convening a meeting of the Central Council for early November. The timing of that meeting will also provide for a substantive discussion on the budget. The party's machinery and structures are there to be used in a positive way and the Constituency Councils should meet prior to that meeting in November in order that the Central Council representatives be fully briefed

prior to their meeting.

The coming budget is a critical one, one of the most important in the history of the state. The country cannot afford instability in the political system at this time. However, this must be balanced by affording our members, to whom the party belongs, the opportunity to engage with and have input into the budgetary debate and any other matters of importance. In the mean time, pending the implementation of improvements in the quality of our engagement, I am asking that you, our councillors and local representatives, play your part in engaging with members and in supporting our TDs and Senators in the coming months.

The next few months will be the toughest of our time in the current Government and I am appealing for party unity in the face of this challenge. I acknowledge that unity must flow in both ways with the PLP and the membership in engaged dialogue, but that unity will be essential. This is not the time for internal strife as it would be detrimental to both the party but also, and more importantly, to the country.

In the context of all of the above, it is important that all of us are cautious in regards to public comments that they may make which may be construed by the media to mean something other than what was intended. There are some in the media that are hostile to Labour and to our values and would only be delighted to use any internal tensions, not for our good, but for the detriment of what we stand for. There must be a degree of confidentiality concerning internal correspondence like this. Without it we will not be able to have full and frank discussions on party policy or on other issues.

We all want to see the best for Labour and, again more importantly, best for the country and its people. I look forward to engaging with you, and with the broader membership, in debate on these matters. Please do not hesitate to contact me on this or on any other issue.

Yours Fraternally,

Colm Keaveney TD
Chairperson of the Labour Party